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Antropologen, historici en de hartslag van het archief

prof.dr. H.W. Roodenburg

Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar Historische antropologie en etnologie van Europa, met bijzondere aandacht voor Nederland, 1500 tot heden, vanwege KNAW/Meertens Instituut bij de faculteit der Sociale wetenschappen van de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam op 18 september 2009.



For Christien and Daniel, and in loving memory of my parents

Rector, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Archives are dead. They may hold thousands or even millions of records, but it's all just stuff. As some Dutch burgomasters realised (or so the story goes), archives are perfect for filling up the local village ditch. And when building a subway – the way it was done in Cologne's medieval town centre – well, an entire tunnel can be filled!

Still, there is no shortage of historians who view archives in highly romantic terms. Ever since the days of Jules Michelet they dream of making the ink on parchment speak and, like Arlette Farge or Carolyn Steedman, they even write fine studies on such longings alone (Farge 1989; Steedman 2001). Perhaps the most hopeless romantics (or animists, if you like) are the cultural historians, those who conceive of culture in broad, anthropological terms. Famous is the injunction of one of them, the English historian G. M. Young, 'to go on reading until you can hear people talking'. But anthropologists taking a long, historical view at culture like to animate the archive as well; for instance, the American anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, who wrote at length about the 'pulse' of the archive in her latest book on the Dutch East Indies. Scholars should learn to feel that pulse, to trace the affective strains hidden in archival forms (Stoler 2009).

With anthropologists now haunting and even fetishising the dead matter of archives, are there any distinctions left between anthropology and history? As anthropologist Wendy James recently observed, 'the question mainly in people's minds these days asks what is the difference between these disciplines, if any?' (James 2003: 298-99). She was certainly not the first to note the two disciplines' rapprochement.

In the following pages I will trace some of the history of this striking convergence. However, knowing less about anthropology, I will not delve deeply into Stoler's work and that of her colleagues, the historical anthropologists. Instead, I will concentrate on the anthropological (or cultural) historians, on those who in their investigations of the everyday have consistently turned to social or cultural anthropology and, to a lesser degree, to various related disciplines.¹

¹ I realise that the term 'historical anthropology' has often been used to denote the latter category, but I prefer to keep the distinction as simple as possible. For various helpful overviews of the rapprochement looking mostly at the writings of anthropologists (discussing Boas, Kroeber, Bernard S. Cohn, Marshall Sahlins, Eric Wolf and many others), see Faubion 1993; Axel 2002; Dube 2007. The historical anthropology emerging in the 1970s in the Netherlands and strongly inspired by the writings of Norbert Elias still needs to be chronicled. But see Blok 1988 and Blok 2001.

The surviving records on the everyday are few and often maddeningly lacunal at that. Hence, more than most of their colleagues, historians working with such records have to rely on their historical imagination; this is where anthropology comes in. As already suggested by Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre or Johan Huizinga, anthropology can shore up the cultural historian's imagination, which it has most certainly done in the past fifty years.

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld engagingly described the two disciplines' convergence as one long dance. As he noted in 2001, 'Anthropology and history have danced a flirtatious *pas de deux* throughout the past century' (Herzfeld 2001: 55). I gladly adopt his metaphor.² In my account of the *rapprochement* I distinguish three moments that correspond surprisingly well with the compositional structure of a classical *pas de deux*.³ I open with an 'entrée', devoted to the 1960s and the first 'flirtations' that cropped up. This is followed by an 'adagio', looking at the 1980s, the high point of the *rapprochement* and covering the period's linguistic turn. Then, in the 1990s, the 'individual variations' set in. In sketching this third moment I discuss some recent developments, particularly how in the last ten years anthropology and history seem to have broken up again – a turn of events I deplore. While the anthropologists are exploring a new, 'corporeal' or 'phenomenological' turn, the cultural historians seem to be begging off. Finally, in the 'coda', the traditional conclusion of the *pas de deux*, I forward a few suggestions to help reunite the two partners and allow them to go on dancing, as Leonard Cohen once sang, 'to the end of love'.

With this lecture I also officially accept the chair, established by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, in the historical anthropology and ethnology of Europe. Working at the Meertens Institute, one of the Academy's research institutes, as a folklorist (or European ethnologist), I have always considered history and anthropology as European ethnology's closest allies in studying the everyday or, in Bourdieuan terms, in de-familiarising the familiar in the European present by means of familiarising the unfamiliar in cultures outside Europe or the past (Bourdieu 1990: 24; cf. Lane 2000: 120-24; Roodenburg 2007). It is from this perspective that I would like to fulfil my teaching commitment and, in this lecture, to approach the remarkable convergence of history and anthropology.

² Other, less elegant metaphors have been proposed as well. Clifford Geertz called the convergence 'an elephant and rabbit stew'; history being the elephant, anthropology the poor rabbit (Geertz 1995: 261).

³ 'As a general rule, the grand *pas de deux* falls into five parts: *entrée*, *adage*, variation for the *danseuse*, variation for the *danseur*, and the *coda*' (Grant 1967: 80). Like dance historians often do, I have taken the variations together.

The 'entrée'

When did the pas de deux take shape? Perhaps already with the first overtures made by the anthropologists Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber or, on the other side, by the historians Bloch, Febvre and Huizinga (and let's not forget the art historian Aby Warburg!). Whatever the case may be it makes sense to date the first actual steps of the 'entrée' to the spring of 1961, when the young historian Keith Thomas came across a lecture by the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard. Both were teaching at All Souls College, in Oxford. In his lecture, entitled 'History and Anthropology', Evans-Pritchard insisted, as he had done before, on a new and close relationship between the disciplines.⁴ In concluding, he even quoted the nineteenth-century historian Frederic Maitland: 'Anthropology must choose between being history or being nothing'.⁵ However, the reverse held as well: 'History must choose between being social anthropology or being nothing' (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 64-5).

Thomas, who much to the amusement of his colleagues already practiced women's history, took up the gauntlet. He answered Evans-Pritchard in a lecture of his own, 'Anthropology and History'. The anthropologist had not spared his colleagues, and neither did Thomas. He condemned the 'firmly empirical tradition' of British historiography whose reputation, as he ironically noted, 'has long rested upon a rigorous command of the primary sources, a distaste for theory and speculation, and a proper aversion to the superficiality which a nodding acquaintance with other disciplines frequently brings in its train'. Typical of such historians was 'the endless analysis of the gymnastics of minor politicians' (Thomas 1963: 3, 18).⁶

A few years later, in a notorious essay in the *Times Literary Supplement*, he pulled out some more stops. He dismissed the first half of the twentieth century as practically having fallen between the cracks of British historical scholarship – a time 'when most historians temporarily lost their bearings'. In his view, 'academic history, for all its scholarly rigour, had succeeded in explaining remarkably little about the workings of human society or the fluctuations in human

⁴ He had already made a similar suggestion in his Marett Lecture in 1950; see Evans-Pritchard 1962: 20.

⁵ Maitland actually wrote: 'by and by anthropology will have the choice between being history and being nothing' (Maitland 1936: 249).

⁶ The original lecture was held in 1961.

affairs'. Historians should no longer continue 'to grub away in the old, empirical tradition', but rather acquaint themselves with the social sciences (Thomas 1966).

In later years Thomas came to regret how he had couched some of his comments, but not their purport. He liked to cut his own path and may have recognised a kindred spirit in Evans-Pritchard, a Welshman like himself. When Thomas sent Evans-Pritchard his lecture, the latter sent him a sardonic reply, observing that Thomas had clearly read more anthropology than he ever had. He found most of it 'totally turgid and jargon-ridden, unreadable, I fear' (Pallares-Burke 2002: 92-3).

Evans-Pritchard objected primarily to the generation of anthropologists before him, to the functionalism of both Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, his former tutor and even predecessor in Oxford. Both had been 'extremely hostile to history' (and yet, how can we explain Huizinga's long-standing friendship with Malinowski?). They were right to distance themselves from both the evolutionists and the diffusionists in anthropology, from their speculative historical observations, but that was not the main issue. This was their quest to find universal laws by which the historical development of societies, their passing through distinct evolutionary stages, could be explained.

According to Evans-Pritchard, the functionalists did exactly the wrong thing. They threw out the good part, the historical framework, keeping the bad one, the tracing of evolutionary laws. As he noted scathingly, 'The functionalist critics of both evolutionists and diffusionists should have challenged them, not for writing history, but for writing bad history. As it was, they dropped the history and kept the pursuit of laws, which was often precisely what made the history bad' (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 47). In other words, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown still conceived of anthropology as a generalising science to be modelled on the natural sciences, whereas Evans-Pritchard saw his discipline as an individualising science, enabling (as Thomas established in his lecture) a close and convergent relationship between history and anthropology.

In their view, both historians and anthropologists should concentrate on the study of social patterns, on understanding cultures as a whole. This explains Evans-Pritchard's regard for Bloch, Febvre and other *historiens-sociologues*, such as Henri Pirenne.⁷ He could also have mentioned Huizinga and his morphological epistemology, but the Dutch historian's star would only rise in the 1970s. Conversely, to study phenomena in terms of each other, not in a vacuum

⁷ He also mentions an older generation, with Gustave Glotz, Maitland and Paul Vinogradoff.

but always against the horizon of a prior understanding of the social system as a whole, was what historians could learn from anthropologists. As Thomas concluded, anthropologists, more than historians, were trained to theoretically integrate the phenomena under study (Thomas 1963: 5-7).

In addition, the anthropologists had their fieldwork, which in Thomas' opinion was the only basic distinction between the two disciplines and anthropology's greatest asset. As he explains, 'in most cases the anthropologist did once live in, or at least visit, the society which he is describing, whereas the historian usually has to work exclusively from documents or archaeological remains'. It gives the anthropologist 'the inestimable advantage of direct experience of matters about which historians have only read in books'. For instance, when the latter stumble onto the unfamiliar in their sources, such as in cases of witchcraft, they may easily view it as something incongruous, an exotic survival of 'unreason', whereas for an anthropologist practices of witchcraft may loom large in his daily concerns (Thomas 1963: 5, 8).

It was precisely such stimuli to the historical imagination that the first anthropological historians were looking for in the other discipline. The many transcontinental analogies between the 'primitive' societies examined by anthropologists and the medieval and early modern societies they studied themselves provided a welcome heuristic compass in navigating their scarce and lacunal sources. The analogies could draw their attention to even the smallest hints of larger social patterns, thus helping them to de-exoticise the past, to familiarise the unfamiliar.

Among the many examples illustrating his point, Thomas included his own investigations into religion and magic in Tudor and Stuart England (Thomas 1963: 8-9). As he also explained in his acclaimed monograph on the subject, thanks to Evans-Pritchard's studies on the Azande and those of other Africanists, such as Max Marwick or Victor Turner, he came to realise how the magical beliefs among his English villagers helped to boost the community's social integration, how it strengthened the traditional obligations of charity and neighbourliness. Those wishing to shirk such duties, generally the nouveaux riches profiting from the period's economic differentiation, still feared the magical power of the indigent who came begging at their doors. With their spells these beggars might harm their health, crops or cattle (Thomas 1971a; cf. Thomas 1971b). As Thomas points out, many such comparisons could be drawn (and not only with sub-Saharan cultures), all amplifying the historian's historical imagination. Conversely, Africanists working on witchcraft welcomed the cultural historians and their global approach.

When Evans-Pritchard retired in 1968, both Thomas and his student Alan Macfarlane participated in the conference held in the master's honour (Douglas 1971; see also Marwick 1970; Macfarlane 1970).

Sketched all too briefly, this is how the *pas de deux* took off. This was the 'entrée'; these were the 1960s. The first anthropological historians turned to anthropology for the transcontinental comparisons to be drawn, which enabled them to trace the broader social patterns in their documents and thus successfully traverse the historical sub-disciplines.

At present, few cultural historians still draw such global analogies. Already in the 1970s, several American historians of witchcraft noted their objection that the African societies visited by anthropologists lacked the cultural complexity of early modern Europe. Even more important was an exchange in 1975 between Thomas and anthropologist Hildred Geertz, who held that western categories such as witchcraft or magic could not simply be transferred to seemingly related cultural phenomena in other periods or in other continents. She did not dismiss Thomas' book, nor did she say that historians and anthropologists should stop drawing ethnographic parallels. In keeping with the linguistic turn coming to the fore in anthropology, she only wished to argue that the conceptual order western thinking imposed on religion and magic was not likely to agree with the order implied in early modern or contemporary African thinking on the subject. Historians and anthropologists should take note of Saussurean linguistics (Geertz 1975; cf. Hutton 2004: 414-15).

Though Geertz phrased her comments carefully, the conclusions drawn by Thomas were nothing short of radical. He realised that with the linguistic turn ('the immense current interest among anthropologists in linguistics, symbolism, and communications theory'), Geertz and many of her colleagues had grown 'chary about using the Western concept of "magic" *tout court*'. Accordingly, he proposed dropping the transcontinental but not the historical analogies. As anthropologist Edmund Leach already observed in 1961, 'English-language patterns of thought are not a necessary model for the whole of human society'. Thomas agreed, up to a point: 'though unsuitable for export they may well be good enough for home' (Leach 1961: 27; Thomas 1975: 94).

The 1980s witnessed an explosion of witchcraft studies concentrating on early modern Europe or the English colonies in America, which but with a few exceptions refrained from further global comparisons. The field developed its own issues and debates, and found support in

another quickly expanding field, namely the history of popular culture (Burke 1978; Muchembled 1978). The Africanists withdrew as well. Largely identifying with the emerging postcolonial studies, they more or less forgot about the historians and their witchcraft studies. A decade later, though, some of them questioned the allegedly greater simplicity of African societies. Confronted with an intensification rather than a dissipation of witch beliefs in the modernising sub-Saharan nation-states, they wished to revisit the transcontinental analogies (Geschiere 1997: 188-223; cf. Hutton 2004: 416-18).

Ironically, while anthropology's linguistic turn put an end to the disciplines' convergence at a comparative level, it inspired a new and far more successful rapprochement at another, epistemological level. In the 1980s many cultural historians sought to buttress their historical imagination, not so much through cross-cultural analogies as through Clifford Geertz's analogy of the text, his symbolic anthropology. The *pas de deux* continued: the 'entrée' may have come to a halt, but the 'adagio' was beginning.

The 'adagio'

Let's start again with Keith Thomas, with his evolving ideas on what an anthropologically informed cultural history (or 'retrospective ethnography', as he likes to call it) should imply. As he observed in 1989: 'The cultural historian's task, like that of the cultural anthropologist, is thus to translate alien cultures into our own terms. He has to make intelligible to modern readers the rules and implicit assumptions of a vanished age'. Such a historian, he continued, has to learn both the spoken and the social language. More concretely, he must learn to approach society as a language in itself, to extend like the structuralists 'the linguistic analogy to society as a whole'. Cultures, then, should be viewed as systems of signs and should be 'read' as such. Each object, practice or belief has its own position in the social system and derives its specific meaning from its contrast with elements elsewhere in the system. For example, cultural historians may contrast a garment like a top hat with a flat cloth cap or, to mention a favourite example of my own, a handshake (which, as our present egalitarian gesture, only originated in the seventeenth century) with a bow or curtsy (Thomas 1991: 75; Roodenburg 1991).⁸ It all depends on the wider symbolic field. To quote another cultural historian writing on the French Revolution: 'The action

⁸ The text relies on a lecture Thomas gave at a Dutch conference on cultural history held in 1989.

of a rioter in picking up a stone can no more be understood apart from the symbolic field that gives it meaning than the action of a priest in picking up a sacramental vessel' (Baker 1990: 13; quoted in Burke 2004: 107).

At the end of the 1980s, then, Thomas identified the task of the cultural historian (an obvious reference to Huizinga's essay from 1929) with the linguistic or interpretive turn. Though he did not mention his name, he clearly associated the turn with Clifford Geertz, precisely as Natalie Davis, another pioneer of the new cultural history, had done in 1975, in her innovative volume of essays on early modern France. Not mentioning Geertz either, she argued that a journeyman's initiation rite, a village feast, or a street disturbance, for instance, 'could be "read" as fruitfully as a diary, a political tract, a sermon, or a body of laws' (Davis 1975: xvi-xvii). In her view as well culture should be approached as an 'ensemble of texts'. In another *locus classicus* the cultural historian Robert Darnton (like Davis teaching at Princeton University and organising interdisciplinary seminars with Geertz for many years) used the same imagery: 'one can read a ritual or a city in the same way just as one can read a folktale or a philosophic text' (Darnton 1984: 5). Similarly, Peter Burke, one of Thomas' first students, described Geertzian interpretation as one of the five hallmarks distinguishing anthropological history from other kinds of social history (Burke 1987: 3).⁹

Of course there were plenty of cultural historians who did not adopt Geertz's epistemological views, including Roger Chartier, who feared that the concrete texts studied by historians would disappear behind all the new, metaphorical texts. His fears were largely confirmed by Darnton's much-debated essay on 'the great cat massacre', grafted onto Geertz's no less contentious essay on the Balinese cockfight (Chartier 1985). There were also anthropologists, among them Paul Rabinow, a former student of Geertz, who were surprised to note that the cultural historians only embraced Geertzian anthropology when it was being questioned by anthropology itself (Rabinow 1986: 241-42). But it is not difficult to understand why Geertz charmed the cultural historians. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s it was the transcontinental analogies that could bolster the historical imagination, in the 1980s it was Geertz's objectivist epistemology, his quite different analogy of the 'text', which could assist historians.

⁹ Burke actually speaks of 'historical anthropology'; cf. n. 1.

Geertz dismissed approaches aimed at the ‘native’s point of view’, in the sense of getting into the native’s head. Ethnographers do not have some ‘preternatural capacity to think, feel, and perceive like a native’ (Geertz 1983: 56). Wishing to disengage the interpretive act from any notion of empathy, he removed it from the mental, subjective realm and brought it out into the publicly accessible realm of signs and symbols, exactly the way a text will always transcend the inner life of its author and open itself to multiple interpretation (Bachmann-Medick 2006: 45-50; Sewell 1999: 38-39). Anthropologists, then, should investigate ‘the symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviors – in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another’. They should strain to read such texts over the native’s shoulder (Geertz 1973: 452-53; 1983: 58).

As Davis clearly saw already in 1975, it was this anchoring of the interpretive act in objective ‘texts’ that could support the historian’s imagination. Her colleague William Sewell Jr. concurred. In a passage reminiscent of Thomas’ 1963 essay, he also noted the huge advantage anthropologists have over historians when it comes to studying the lives of ordinary people. The former may ‘live with them, learn their languages, engage them in conversation, observe their rituals, and participate in their daily routines’. The latter, when analyzing the lives of peasants, workers, women, slaves or colonised peoples, have recourse only to their archives and libraries with the full realisation that most of what was recorded and subsequently collected in these institutions was not so much phrased in the people’s own words as in those of their ‘betters’. But, as Sewell continues, ‘some of the symbolic forms through which the dead experienced their world are available to us in surviving documents’, however piecemeal or second hand (Sewell 1999: 38-9). Like the Balinese cockfight, their rituals, social conventions and language, as recorded in documents may also be read – like ever so many symbolic constructions – over the people’s shoulders.

The linguistic turn was a constructivist turn and if not all ethnographic historians adopted a Geertzian approach – aptly described by Vincent Crapanzano as ‘constructions of constructions of constructions’ (Crapanzano 1986: 74) –, they could turn to other constructivist approaches en vogue in the 1980s (cf. Burke 2004: 79-90). According to the historian Hayden White, the past itself was a construction, at least as it was represented by (mostly nineteenth-century) historians, with their rhetorical stratagems and their ‘plots’ derived from literary genres (White 1973; Ankersmit 1981). Inspired by White and others, Davis wrote her famous book *Fiction in the*

Archives, in which she looked at narrative techniques employed in the judicial courts of early modern France, particularly in the petitions for pardon addressed to the king (Davis 1987; cf. Maza 1993). She, thus, suggested an ethnography *in* the archive, as Stoler writes, akin to Carlo Ginzburg's approach in his celebrated book on the sixteenth-century miller Menocchio (Ginzburg 1976). Drawing on their work, Stoler in turn proposes an ethnography *of* the archive, attending closely to the affective registers of colonial governance as they can be traced in its archival habits and conventions (Stoler 2009; cf. Dirks 2006).

Other cultural historians derived inspiration from the writings of Michel Foucault, his well-known historical analyses of the regulatory 'discourses' of insanity, punishment, and sexuality (Foucault 1961; 1975; 1976-1984). Adopting these and related approaches, other scholars investigated gender and social class as being socially constituted. Similarly, following Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm or Anthony Cohen, traditions and communities came to be viewed as social constructions, even as 'inventions' (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1980; Cohen 1985). Their work spawned countless publications, all analyzing the invention of communities, nations and ethnicity - and in the process stimulated a major recasting of the discipline of European ethnology. As Geertz argued in *Negara*, his influential study on the Balinese theatre-state, monarchies were constructions as well (Geertz 1980). The book informed Burke's own analysis of the 'fabrication' of Louis XIV (Burke 1992).

We should take care not to exaggerate the scope of the linguistic turn. Yes, it had a huge impact on history and anthropology as well as the humanities and social sciences at large, including European ethnology. But there were plenty of historians, not only in Britain, who were still satisfied with their 'firmly empirical tradition', disinterested in making even 'a nodding acquaintance' with anthropology, linguistics or any other 'fad' at the time.

Nor was the turn as dominant as some historiographers would have it. Scholars also adopted the practice approaches of Pierre Bourdieu or Michel de Certeau, just as they identified with the dramaturgical approaches of Kenneth Burke, Erving Goffman and Victor Turner or the performance approaches of Roger Abrahams, Dell Hymes and Richard Schechner, all of which defended a less textually oriented and more dynamic point of view. There were overlaps as well. Influenced by Kenneth Burke, Geertz embraced a dramaturgical perspective, making his anthropology all the more attractive to the cultural historians. Others, though, criticised its secondary significance. As Pierre Bourdieu concluded, within such 'objectivism' in

anthropology practices were only viewed as ‘executions’, as ‘stage parts, performances of scores, or the implementing of plans’ (Bourdieu 1977: 96; cf. Fabian 1983: 139-41).

Geertz’s neglect of history, power and social conflict was also commented on, though not so much by the historians as the materialists among his colleagues (Asad 1982; Roseberry 1982). One interesting observation focusing on Geertz’s analysis of Balinese state ritual and anticipating some of the questions preoccupying the discipline today was made by anthropologist Maurice Bloch. In his view, Geertz had failed to explain *why* the ritual had such an emotional and ideological impact, *why* its participants, in the terms of Louis Althusser, felt that what they were being presented with was somehow ‘true’. Geertz did refer to the splendour of it all but, as Bloch objected, not all splendour has such an effect (Bloch 1987: 295-96). Responding to Geertz and Bloch, the cultural historian David Cannadine phrased the question in more general terms: ‘Why exactly is it that ceremonies impress?’ (Cannadine 1987: 15-6). The same question was raised in the new, recently started NWO research project *Heritage Dynamics*, coordinated by Birgit Meyer, Mattijs van de Port and myself.

This important project has a strong comparative orientation. It addresses four multicultural societies – the Netherlands, Brazil, Ghana and South Africa –, studying the constructing of cultural canons in each of them, regardless of whether they are initiated or even actively supported by the state or by social groups from below. The project also posits that the success or demise of such canons of ‘truth’ cannot be explained by merely ‘unmasking’ them as ever so many ‘invented traditions’. To arrive at a fuller understanding, one must ask *why* the canons impress or, more precisely, why some are experienced as persuasive and binding and others not. Accordingly, the project focuses firstly on what it describes as the ‘politics of authentication’ – the strategies employed by the various players to make their canons be felt as ‘true’ or ‘authentic’. Secondly, it investigates what it defines as the ‘aesthetics of persuasion’, the canons’ capacity to resonate with the bodily habitus, senses, and lived experience of the social groups involved (Meyer, Van de Port, Roodenburg 2008).

Such questions concerning the visceral and emotional hold of symbolic constructions were rarely asked in the 1980s, either by anthropologists or by cultural historians, although the various practice, dramaturgical and performance approaches already suggested alternatives for circumventing or going beyond the linguistic turn. Performance theory in particular already underlined the experiential, affective and transformative dimensions of ritual. As Edward

Schieffelin wrote, 'performances, whether ritual or dramatic, create and make present realities vivid enough to beguile, amuse or terrify. And through these presences, they alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind' (Schieffelin 1998: 194).

Currently the three approaches seem to have converged in what may best be described as a quickly expanding 'corporeal' or 'phenomenological' direction, drawing strongly on mid twentieth-century philosophy, especially the writings of Merleau-Ponty. From the early 1990s on, a growing number of anthropologists and other social scientists, displeased by the linguistic turn and its privileging of writing, text, script and vision, have identified with this younger approach, focusing on notions of habitus, the full human sensorium, and emotional cultures. Obviously, by drawing attention to what rituals, cultural canons or any other symbolic forms actually *do* in corporeal, sensorial or emotional terms, the phenomenological turn, like its predecessor, the linguistic turn of the 1980s, may well assist the cultural historian in his historical imagination. Understanding how the mind and body were generally felt to be indivisible in late medieval or early modern times will help him grasp the embodied and sensory perception of the past, all the non-discursive ways in which the people and the objects which surrounded them existed in the world. However, compared to their colleagues in anthropology, to date few cultural historians seem to be interested in the new turn. It would appear that after the explorative 'entrée' and the highly successful 'adagio', the two dance partners have entered the third movement of their pas de deux, the 'individual variations'. Let's start with the anthropologists.

The 'individual variations'

The initial impetus to the present corporeal or phenomenological interpretation may be traced to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when various anthropologists and other scholars began censuring the linguistic bent for both its mentalist and ocularcentric points of view. With its understanding of all culture as 'text' even the body and the senses came to be defined as such. But to quote one of the critics, the anthropologist Paul Connerton, there are at least two angles from which the body may be construed as socially constituted. The first views the body in terms of its symbolism, of the attitudes towards it, or of discourses about it; the second sees it as socially constituted in the sense of being culturally shaped in its performances, in its actual practices and

behaviour. Rather than texts and signs, the performing and understanding body is foregrounded (Connerton 1989: 104).

As a somewhat desperate historian looking at the many language-based analyses in the field put it ten years later, 'There is so much written about the body, but it all focuses on such a recent period. And in so much of it, the body dissolves into language. The body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid – that body just isn't there' (quoted in Bynum 1999: 241). In other words, historians should take a less predisposed approach. They should attempt to restore the body in all its materiality and concrete practices. It should become 'flesh' again, regain its mortality and – a notable element in the historian's lament – its emotions: a body may also be 'afraid'.

Such interest in the body's emotional knowing already informed the anthropology of the body as it emerged in the 1990s, perhaps mostly so in medical anthropology (Lock and Scheper-Hughes 1987, 1990; Lock 1992; Desjarlais 1992; Lyon and Barbalet 2000) but in other fields as well. There is a striking parallel here with another notable development of the 1990s – the rise of 'affective neuroscience' with its prominent interest in bodily feeling and emotions (Damasio 1994, 1999, 2003) or, in its research on the so-called 'mirror neurons', in the human faculty of empathy (Rizzolatti 2008). As these neuroscientists argue, there are no clear-cut distinctions between cognition and affect. Looming over the latter research once more is the presence of Merleau-Ponty, with his ideas on the indivisibility of mind and body, on human perception as essentially embodied and prereflexive.

Among the first scholars to adopt Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, anchoring it more firmly in society and history, were Bourdieu and Connerton. Though Bourdieu, seeking to reconcile the insights of Merleau-Ponty with the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss (Lane 2000: 102; cf. Csordas 1990; Roodenburg 2004b), advanced the concept of 'habitus' and Connerton, taking a different route, chose to speak of 'habit memory' or 'bodily memory', they both stressed the role of our bodily automatisms. Drawing on Marcel Mauss and his notion of 'body techniques', they asserted that culture is always more than signs and symbols, that from early childhood on it is literally incorporated in our bodies, in the ways we stand, walk, dance or swim, or in the ways we feel, think and speak. Once incorporated the techniques turn into automatisms, they become pre-reflexive – 'history turned into nature', as Bourdieu used to emphasize. Both anthropologists also agreed that every social group tends to imbue its bodily

automatisms with the values and categories it is most anxious to preserve (Bourdieu 1977: 218; Connerton 1989: 102; cf. Strathern 1996: 25-39). Especially through ceremonies and rituals, with their strong corporeal engagement, the automatisms may rouse the deepest of emotions. Rituals do not so much refer to something else, for example to pre-existing social or gender hierarchies, as embody and perform these hierarchies, with all the bodily feelings involved.

Also in the 1990s, and obviously related to this anthropology of embodiment, a sensory (or sensuous) anthropology emerged that redefined the senses as the means by which the human body perceives the world, and conceived of ceremonies and rituals, with all their sensory richness, not so much as ways of reading as of ‘sensing’ the world (Jackson 1983). Similarly, anthropologists Constance Classen and David Howes have contended that every culture, past or present, should be grasped in its own sensory order or ‘registers’. Whereas western cultures distinguish five senses – vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch – generally ranking the gustatory, olfactory and tactile senses ‘lower’, as more related to women, children or the labouring classes (as in George Orwell’s notorious phrase ‘the lower classes smell’), other cultures distinguish fewer or more senses and may value the ‘lower’ ones as the primary ones.¹⁰ Accordingly, sensory anthropology insists that the senses always be studied as a whole, as forming part of different sensory hierarchies varying through time and space. It also underlines intersensoriality, rather than the harmonious notion of synaesthesia. The senses may work in concord, but they may also be conflicted or confused, involving strong emotions.¹¹ Finally, sensory anthropology points to the ‘education’ of the senses, construing them more or less like Mauss’ techniques of the body as being physiologically grounded skills. People have to learn how to use their senses, including such ‘inner’ ones as proprioception or kinesthesia (Classen 1993; Howes 2003: 29-51; 2006; Sklar 2008).¹²

Recently, scholars of material culture, taking an experiential view of its role in human relations, have addressed the deep mutuality between the sensory and the material (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips 2006; Howes 2006; Spyer 2006).¹³ Anthropologists studying images as a special type of material culture have even recovered the idea of a corporeal aesthetics. Rejecting

¹⁰ Naturally, I am referring to Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), in which reflecting on his childhood he wrote, ‘That was what we were taught – *the lower classes smell*’.

¹¹ For recent anthropological studies on the emotions, see Reddy 2001, Harkin 2003, and Milton and Svasek 2003.

¹² Over the last years various helpful readers have been published. See Bull and Back 2003; Howes 2003; Classen 2005; Korsmeyer 2005; Drobnick 2006; Edwards and Bhaumik 2008; For the most recent developments, see the inspiring journal *The Senses and Society*, which first came out in 2006.

Kantian aesthetics, with its elevation of the ‘disinterested’ beholder, they have reverted to the Aristotelian concept of ‘aisthesis’, which unlike the Kantian notion holds that the ways we engage with images are always bodily and multisensory (Buck-Morss 1992; Pinney 2004, 2006; Verrips 2006; Meyer 2006). From this arises the anthropologist Chris Pinney’s notion of a ‘corpoethetics’ that studies ‘the sensory embrace of images, the bodily engagement that most people (except Kantians and modernists) have with artworks’ (Pinney 2001: 158). Similarly, media theorists launched the term ‘somaesthetics’ (Shusterman 2000), suggesting that one speak of a ‘corporeal eye’ (Turvey 1998), a ‘corporeal image’ (MacDougall 2005) or (drawing on the nineteenth-century art historian Alois Riegl) of ‘haptic visuality’ (Marks: 2000, 2002).

Various art historians have taken a similar path. In his book *What do Pictures Want?* W. J. T. Mitchell urged his colleagues ‘to describe the specific relations of vision to the other senses, especially hearing and touch, as they are elaborated within particular cultural practices’ (Mitchell 2005: 349). Before him other art historians, including David Freedberg, Michael Fried and David Morgan, defended a similar sensory integration of the visual. The writings of Merleau-Ponty informed both Fried’s and Morgan’s thinking on the subject, and the latter is also deeply interested in anthropology (Fried 1990, 2002; Morgan 1998, 2009). Freedberg, known for his pioneering work on the emotional hold of images (Freedberg 1989), recently took a different track, looking in particular at the investigations of Vittorio Gallese and Giacomo Rizzolatti into mirror neurons and empathy as confirming the more intuitive ideas on art and *Einfühlung*, already developed by Robert Vischer and other nineteenth-century art theorists, including Riegl. But he also wishes to include an anthropology of the body, referring to Tim Ingold, Carlo Severi, and Michael Jackson, for instance (Freedberg 2007; 2008; cf. Onians 2008; Roodenburg 2010).

These are all important and exciting developments in which anthropologists play a more than prominent role in seeking to go beyond the interpretive turn: to allow for the non-discursive to emerge, the rich but mostly taken for granted realm of our bodily automatisms, our sensory worlds and emotional styles. But what about the cultural historians? Can we distinguish in their continuing attempts to ‘make the ink on parchment speak’ a comparable phenomenological or corporeal bent? Is there also a cultural history of the full human sensorium, and are there related histories of embodiment and the emotions?

¹³ See also the innovative journal *Material Religion* begun in 2005.

The last decades have definitely witnessed a rising historical interest in the senses but, as the author of a first major overview concluded, the subject ‘is still very much in its infancy’ (Smith 2007a: 117). Sensory history is still fairly undertheorized. Its practitioners have certainly discussed some of the interpretive and methodological issues implied in studying the senses in history (Corbin 1991: 227-244; Schmidt 2000: 1-37; Jütte 2005: 8-19; Smith 2007a, 2007b). Even more ‘a prisoner of language than the anthropologist’, to quote Alain Corbin, they have stressed the difference between writing histories of the perception of the senses and, however difficult, of the senses and their manifold meanings themselves (Corbin 1991: 239). If only to avoid the pitfalls of the ‘Foucauldians’ (Howes 1989: 93), they have insisted on employing perspectives both from above and below. Finally, they have written on how individual senses may be given different emphases in different periods. For example, criticising the older historical views of Marshall McLuhan or Walter Ong (McLuhan 1962; Ong 1982), they have published on the hegemony of the ocular in late medieval and early modern Europe, on its actual scope – were the other senses that strongly tuned down or ‘anaesthetized’ (cf. Buck-Morss 1992; Verrips 2006)? – , and on exactly when and why this ‘great divide’ came about. Was it effected by the dissemination of linear visual perspective, the print revolution, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, or perhaps by a cumulative effect of all these moments together (Smith 2007a: 27-35)?

Such questions on the past’s changing sensory orders are more than relevant. But considering the present state of play they are also difficult to answer. One of the major problems is that most studies in sensory history have focused on only one of the senses and have largely neglected intersensoriality. To mention a few examples of such work, there is the pioneering research by Alain Corbin, especially his studies on smell and hearing, covering eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France (Corbin 1982; 1994). The olfactory has been further explored in a historical overview from antiquity to the present day (Classen, Howes and Synnott 1994), and in various monographs on Paris and England (Barnes 2006; Cockayne 2007). Hearing has been studied as well, for instance in monographs on the acoustic worlds of early America and of early modern France and England (Johnson 1995; Smith 1999; Schmidt 2000; Rath 2003). Another topic now becoming popular among historians is that of tactility, with inspiring books on early modern England and early America (Boyle 1998; Hall 1999; Gowing 2003; Harvey 2003). Rather exceptional are histories of the gustatory (Gabbacia 2005; McWilliams 2005), though

naturally many histories of food discuss the subject in passing. Perhaps cultural histories of sight demonstrate the present shortcomings of sensory history best. The discussion on its rising prominence in the west mostly neglected to look at the full human sensorium, at sensory hierarchies as a whole (cf. Classen and Howes 2006; Edwards and Bhaumik 2008).

This is not to deny the quality and great importance of this work; these are fine and helpful studies indeed. But they also make it clear that as a fairly recent field sensory history cannot yet compare with sensory anthropology. As the medical (and cultural) historian Roy Porter has shown, until the end of the eighteenth century medical science adhered to what we would now describe as a psychosomatic universe (Porter 1990: 47-9). Indeed, even Descartes never was the confirmed Cartesian that so many twentieth-century philosophers and scientists would make of him (Reiss 1996). Up till now, however, few sensory historians seem to have adopted a more phenomenologically informed perspective, which may do justice to the period's largely unCartesian perceptions of mind and body. Nor did they much advocate a more bodily and experiential integration of the senses, a merging with, preferably, cultural histories of embodiment, emphasizing the education of the senses, and cultural histories of the emotions (cf. Reddy 2001, 2009). In that respect the sensory historians are obviously lagging behind the sensory anthropologists.

Let me conclude with a few examples of the broader corporeal or phenomenological approach I have in mind. We may start, now that we are in the thick of it, with a classical dance form, with the *pas de deux*. Of course, early modern ballet was about seeing and being seen but as the contemporary dance manuals point out, it was also about hearing. The dancers had to carefully listen to the music and to minimize the sound of their steps and breathing. Ballet was also, through the desired incorporation of uprightness among the elite, about kinesthesia, bodily techniques and bodily memory. And, prominently so in the *pas de deux*, it was all about touch (Cohen Bull 1997; Roodenburg 2007; Smith 2007a: 23-4). Early modern dancing may be viewed as a prime example of embodying and sensing the world.

As a fine illustration of 'aisthesis', of the bodily and multisensory ways in which Europeans of the past engaged with images, we may take the art historian Michael Baxandall's famous study on painting and experience in fifteenth-century Italy. As he observed, to a Quattrocento man beholding a work of art meant definitely more than just an act of looking. Through one's upbringing and education it also encompassed the long-time incorporation of the

proper visual, tactile or kinesthetic habits or skills. Baxandall did not speak of tactility or kinesthetics, nor did he employ notions of habitus or habit memory. But it may be rewarding to have a fresh, Bourdieuan and sensory look at his book, something which Bourdieu himself already suggested (Bourdieu 1996), and to adopt such a Baxandallian-Bourdieuian approach to our bodily, multisensory and emotional ways of engaging with images also when studying other artistic periods, for instance Netherlandish painting (Roodenburg 2010a).

Central to the contemporary writings on how to actually effect such engagement was the rediscovered rhetoric of antiquity, especially its fifth department of delivery, of *actio* or *pronuntiatio*. It still enjoyed that prominent position in the eighteenth century, especially in the age of sentimentalism, when whole audiences, men or women, could burst into tears when reading or listening to poetry, watching a priest or minister deliver God's word, or visiting a play, beholding a painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, or listening to music by Christoph-Willibald von Gluck or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Elkins 2001: 108-49; Johnson 1995).

As the period's manuals on painting, drama and rhetoric make clear, all these bodily and emotional states could and should be induced. Preachers, for example, were supposed to develop their own psychophysical techniques. Like actors they should learn how to instrumentalize their bodies, how at the proper moment to spontaneously break into tears and thus to move the hearts of the faithful. Weeping was viewed as one of the 'sensible marks', to use the period's own terminology, to make the transcendental accessible. In other words, we may approach the preacher's body as his primary instrument or, to borrow from Birgit Meyer, as his primary 'sensational form' (Roodenburg 2010b). Such forms – bodies, objects or rituals – may be defined as 'relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental'. As Meyer explains, sensation has a double connotation: it encompasses feeling as well as its actual inducement (Meyer 2006: 9). We could say that body techniques, the sensory and what has been described as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) were all involved.

Perhaps the last example demonstrates best what the cultural historians gain by asking *why* symbolic constructions impress. By focusing on the constructions' visceral and emotional hold, on how they were made to resonate and actually resonated with the habitus, the sensory world and the lived experience of the people involved, cultural historians may develop a fuller and richer understanding of the everyday in the past. Adopting notions from the

phenomenological turn, they may again enhance their historical imagination and thus find new ways to hear the people talking, to make the ink on parchment speak.

Coda

Have I been overly critical of the cultural historians? My discontent may have been prompted by witnessing the exodus from academia of the famous generation of cultural historians, from Peter Burke, Robert Darnton, Natalie Davis and Willem Frijhoff to Carlo Ginzburg, Daniel Roche, Quentin Skinner and Keith Thomas. The new generations are unavoidably less visible, travelling comfortably but also relatively more anonymously along the paths paved by the pioneers. What I (yet another hopeless romantic) have tried to point out is that cultural historians today would be well advised to follow some of the newer paths and thus breathe new life into the *pas de deux*.

Of course, these tracks have been explored by other disciplines as well, from art history, visual studies and neuroscience to, for instance, sociology, psychology, religious studies, cultural studies and, on a more modest scale, also folklore studies (or European ethnology) (e.g. Bendix 2000, 2005; Frykman and Löfgren 1996; Frykman and Gilje 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2005; Löfgren and Wilk 2006; Roodenburg 2007; Sklar 1994; Stengs 2007). Working as a folklorist myself, yet having been appointed at this university's Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology to teach the historical anthropology (or anthropological history) of Europe, I cannot wait to bring anthropology, cultural history and European ethnology together. Finding its closest partners in cultural history and anthropology and having made it its main task to systematically defamiliarise the European 'familiar', the everyday in all its taken-for-grantedness, European ethnology has profited greatly from both neighbours, the one familiarising the unfamiliar in cultures of the past, the other familiarising the unfamiliar in cultures outside the West. In the process the linguistic turn, with its interest in the construction or even invention of traditions, nations, ethnicities and so on, substantially transformed the discipline from a theoretical, methodological and historiographical point of view (e.g. Köstlin 1996; Bendix 1997; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Dekker, Roodenburg and Rooijakkers 2000). Obviously, in asking *why* traditions, nations or ethnicities impress, it may profit again from the present phenomenological turn. Conversely, anthropologists and cultural historians may profit from European ethnology with its long-standing interest in the highly corporeal worlds of

ceremony and ritual, of telling tales, singing songs, dancing, dressing, handicraft and all material culture in general, making the discipline a welcome ally in rebutting purely textual and ocularcentric approaches. As Orvar Löfgren cautioned, people do not only look or gaze at things, read or contemplate them, 'they may also touch, smell, and taste them; people drag objects around, use, wear, tear, fix, repair, and maintain them, grow tired of them, put them away, discard them, and rediscover them' (Löfgren 2000: 161).

What may well unite the three disciplines (and various others, of course) is Meyer's innovative concept of sensational forms, which seems like a perfect alternative to Geertz's symbolic forms. Though Meyer employs the term only as a mode of invoking and organising access to the transcendental, of making it 'sense-able', I believe it can function in a much broader context as a key concept of the corporeal or phenomenological turn at large. What is being studied from the latter point of view are sensational forms, that is: all socio-cultural forms, religious or not, involving the visceral and the emotional, all forms resonating or actually made to resonate with the habitus, the full human sensorium and the lived experience of the people under study.

As Peter Burke observed, the linguistic turn was very much informed by what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has described as 'liquid modernity', the optimistic idea that all socio-cultural forms are malleable, fluid or fragile (Bauman 2000; Burke 2004: 76). The present turn in the humanities and social sciences seems to be less impressed by all this 'makeability'. It looks first and foremost at issues of response, of resonance, and thus proposes not only a richer and more encompassing but also a more realist view of the dynamics of culture. It may be more in keeping with our own, less optimistic times.

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